DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 454 PS 021 963

AUTHOR Katz, Lilian G.
TITLE Dispositions as Educational Goals. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, Urbana, Ill.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO EDO-PS-93-10
PUB DATE Sep 93
CONTRACT RR97002007
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Clearinghouse Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Children; Curriculum Development; Definitions; Early Childhood Education; *Educational Objectives; Elementary Education; *Personality Traits; *Prosocial Behavior; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS ERIC Digests

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this digest is to examine the meaning of the term "disposition" and to suggest the implications of dispositions for educational practice. A disposition is a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal. Dispositional considerations are important because: (1) acquisition of knowledge and skills does not guarantee that the knowledge and skills will be used and applied; (2) the instructional processes by which some knowledge and skills are acquired may themselves damage or undermine the disposition to use the knowledge and skills; (3) teachers need to support desirable dispositions and weaken undesirable dispositions; (4) there is thought to be an optimum amount of positive feedback for young children above which they may become preoccupied with their performance and the judgments of others rather than the task at hand; and (5) dispositions are less likely to be acquired through didactic processes than to be modeled by young children through exposure to people who exhibit them. Therefore, it seems timely to include dispositions among important outcomes of education. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education

University of Illinois • 805 W. Pennsylvania Ave. • Urbana, IL 61801-4897
(217) 333-1386 • ericeece@ux1.cso.uiuc.edu

ERIC DIGEST
September 1993 • EDO-PS-93-10

ED 363 454

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Dispositions as Educational Goals

Lilian G. Katz

One of the major questions to be addressed when developing a curriculum is, What should be learned? One way to answer this question (Katz, 1991) is to adopt at least four types of learning goals, those related to knowledge, skills, dispositions, and feelings. The acquisition of both knowledge and skills is taken for granted as an educational goal, and most educators would also readily agree that many feelings (e.g., self-esteem) are also influenced by school experiences and are thus worthy of inclusion among learning goals. However, dispositions are seldom included, although they are often implied by the inclusion of attitudes (e.g., attitudes toward learning) as goals. The main purpose of this digest is to examine the meaning of the term *disposition* and to suggest the implications of dispositions for practice.

What Are Dispositions?

It seems clear that the term *disposition* can be used to distinguish trends in behavior from skills, attitudes, traits, and mindless habits (e.g., fastening one's seat belt), and that these distinctions have useful, practical implications even in the absence of desirable precision. Concerning skills, for example, educators, and most likely other observers as well, recognize that it is possible to have skills and lack a taste for or habit of using them. Similarly, knowledge can be acquired without having the disposition to use it. Further clarification of the nature of dispositions may be obtained by distinguishing dispositions from related constructs such as thought processes, motives, and work inhibition.

For the purposes of exploring the implications of dispositions, the following tentative definition is proposed:

> A disposition is a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed to a broad goal.

In the case of curiosity, for example, children can be said to have the disposition to be curious if they typically and frequently respond to their environment by exploring, examining, and asking questions about it. Similarly, the disposition to complain or whine would be robust if exhibited frequently, and weak if rarely exhibited. Both are examples of dispositions: they are intentional and mindfully directed toward particular objects and situations in order to achieve goals. Because not all dispositions are desirable, teaching practices must seek not only to strengthen the desirable ones, but also to weaken the undesirable ones.

Implications for Practitioners

There are several reasons for suggesting that dispositions should be included among educational goals. The most important reason is, as already mentioned, that the acquisition of knowledge and skills does not guarantee that they will be used and applied. As Cantor (1990) puts it, "having" is not necessarily "doing." For example, it is likely that most children have listening skills, but they may or may not have the disposition to be listeners. Teaching practices should take into account ways that the dispositions associated with skills can be strengthened.

Second, dispositional considerations are important because the instructional processes by which some knowledge and skills are acquired may themselves damage or undermine the disposition to use them. For example, one risk of early formal instruction in reading skills is that the amount of drill and practice required for successful reading of the English language at an early age may undermine children's dispositions to be readers (Katz, 1992).

It is clearly not useful for a child to learn skills if, in the processes of learning them, the disposition to use them is damaged. On the other hand, having the disposition to be a reader without the requisite skills would also not be desirable. Thus the acquisition of reading skills and the disposition to be a reader should be mutually inclusive goals of education.

PS 022 363

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Third, some important dispositions relevant to education, such as the disposition to investigate, may be thought of as inborn. When children's experiences support the manifestations of a disposition with appropriate scaffolding (see Rogoff, Gauvain, and Ellis, 1990) and environmental conditions, the disposition is likely to become robust. Without such supportive experiences it is likely to weaken or perhaps be extinguished. Though knowledge and skills not acquired early in life might be acquired later, dispositions are probably less amenable to reacquisition once damaged.

Fourth, the processes of selecting curriculum and teaching strategies should include considerations of how desirable dispositions can be strengthened and undesirable dispositions can be weakened. Therefore, when selecting teaching practices, opportunities for children to exhibit desirable dispositions should be considered. For example, if the disposition to accept peers of diverse backgrounds is to be strengthened, then opportunities to engage in that behavior must be available.

Fifth, on the basis of the evidence accumulated from research on mastery versus performance motivation, it seems reasonable to suggest that there is an optimum amount of positive feedback for young children above which children may become preoccupied with their performance and the judgments of others rather than involved in the task, and hence their achievement would be acquired at the expense of their disposition to learn.

Sixth, dispositions are less likely to be acquired through didactic processes than to be modeled by young children as they are around people who exhibit them. If teachers want their young pupils to have robust dispositions to investigate, hypothesize, experiment, and so forth, they might consider making their own such intellectual dispositions more visible to the children. The list of potential ways that teachers could exhibit the intellectual dispositions to be strengthened and supported is very long and deserves serious attention in the course of curriculum planning and teacher education.

Conclusion

Much research is needed to determine which dispositions merit attention. It seems timely to include dispositions among important outcomes of education at every level. By doing so we are likely to pay more deliberate attention to ways in which desirable ones can be strengthened, and undesirable ones can be weakened. For the moment, one of the most important dispositions to be listed in educational goals is the disposition to go on learning. Any educational approach that undermines that disposition is miseducation.

Adapted from *Dispositions: Definitions and Implications for Early Childhood Practices,* by Lilian G. Katz. Urbana, IL:ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. 1993. (Catalog #211; 47pp.; $5).

For More Information

Ames, C. (1992). Classrooms: Goals, Structures, and Student Motivation. *Journal of Educational Psychology* 84(3): 261-271. EJ 452 395.

Cantor, N. (1990). From Thought to Behavior: "Having" and "Doing" in the Study of Personality and Cognition. *American Psychologist* 45(6): 735-750. EJ 412 621.

Dweck, C. (1991). Self-Theories and Goals: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development. In R.A. Dienstbier (Ed.). *Perspectives on Motivation. Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, 1990.* Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press. pp. 199-236.

Katz, L.G. (1992). *What Should Young Children Be Learning?* ERIC Digest. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education. ED 290 554.

Katz, L.G. (1991). Pedagogical Issues in Early Childhood Education. In S.L. Kagan, (Ed.). *The Care and Education of America's Young Children: Obstacles and Opportunities. Ninetieth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Part I.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp. 50-68.

Rogoff, B., Gauvain, M., and Ellis, S. (1990). Development Viewed in Cultural Context. In P. Light, S. Sheldon, and M. Woodhead (Eds.). *Learning to Think.* London: Routledge. pp. 292-339.

References identified with an ED (ERIC document) number are cited in the ERIC database. Documents are available in ERIC microfiche collections at more than 825 locations worldwide. Documents can also be ordered through EDRS: (800) 443-ERIC. References with an EJ (ERIC journal) number are available from the original journal, interlibrary loan services, or article reproduction clearinghouses, such as: UMI (800) 732-0616; or ISI (800) 523-1850.

This publication was funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. DERR97002007. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the positions or policies of OERI. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE